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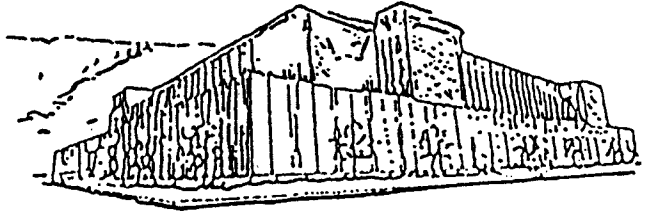
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ADVENTURES IN DOT TO DOT

by

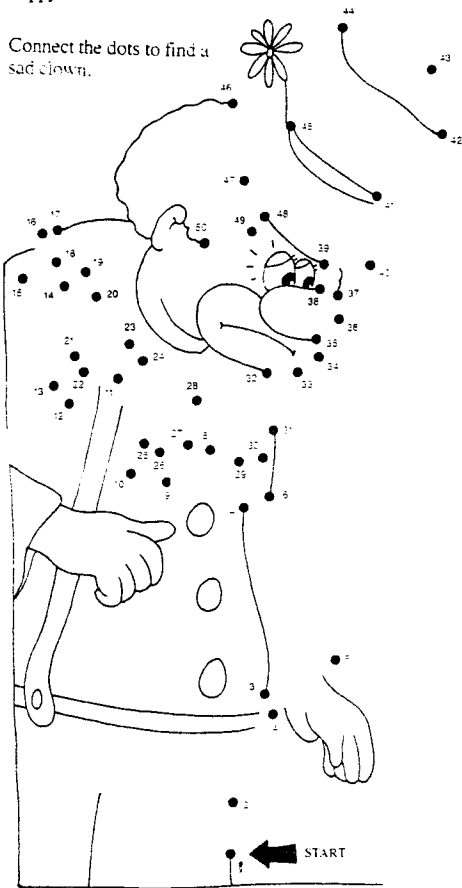
Aaron Q. Long

B.A. University of Findlay, Ohio 1993

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
The University of Montana  
1997

But one clown was not  
happy.

Connect the dots to find a  
sad clown.



Approved by:

*Patricia Goedicke*

Chairperson

*[Signature]*

Dean, Graduate School

5-9-97

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For my mother, Virginia A. Long, who  
once grounded me from "talking privileges"  
for an entire weekend.

## Practice

(For Virginia Long)

### I

Assume one cannot reach an apple beyond one's reach.  
What then?  
Wait for the tall man or the wind or the birds  
to shake it free?  
Maybe one prefers to find a ladder or a stick.  
Maybe one prefers  
to pick one's own apple. Assume one apple is just  
a start.  
What then? One has climbed and stretched with stick  
in hand,  
and one can't reach. Assume, of course, apples  
are fruit  
one loves. Apple tastes of roast duck, chocolate  
syrup, of kiwi  
and papaya, the purple flesh of plum. What then?  
Assume one needs  
only rap at one's chest three times and never want  
for apples?

### II

A stance  
of sorts,  
three meters  
high, board  
bending slightly  
the short weight  
of a boy,  
the slick suit,  
chill in July  
-- chicken skin --  
the balls of feet  
digging in  
to blue grit  
arms out straight  
to finger tips,  
facing the fulcrum,  
water like water  
slapping water.  
He cannot know  
the key to this.  
He presses his chin  
to his chest.  
The key is falling  
straight backwards.

III

X plus Z is sometimes  
a very expensive vase.  
She turns the landscape over  
reaches for a dry brick,  
starts her art again.  
And Y?  
What has become of Y?  
The scraping sounds are terrible.  
She thinks she feels  
warm skin against  
the backs of her hands.

Shaking in a Jar

From the center

If you play a child,  
you have to give her a chance.  
"What are you thinking?" I ask.  
Her tongue between lips --  
the possibilities.  
There are O's in opposite corners.  
The center is open.

Hanging a poster, the Pope has just whacked  
his thumb with a hammer. Tomorrow, it is written,  
he will lose at Yahtzee.

Is my theme different from yours?

Yesterday, I had difficulties wiping.  
I know what is ahead of me.  
"Cold turkey" it is called.  
Still, I cannot bring myself to eat it.

We talk for three hours  
about colons.  
Lester prefers dashes.  
"They are different," he says.

Her fingers clamped around the pencil,  
like her mother taught her,  
she marks an oblong O on the top row.  
"You've lost," I say. Cheering.

This room

This room grows  
small about me.  
My family  
in the corner,  
kisses,  
whispers behind  
their hands.  
There's shampoo  
in their hair,  
cool jars of  
sandwich spread  
in their square  
purses.

I feel  
my feet  
with my feet.  
So this is my sex.  
The frame beneath  
me groans.  
I hear myself  
breathing  
through my nose,  
and I am  
eating sandwiches.

My skin sticks  
to my sheets.  
Were they closed?  
I close my eyes.

Of course  
this isn't my mother.  
Of course my father  
is not the man  
who raps at his chest.  
My mother wears  
rubber gloves.  
She turns me  
once a day.

Poster

They've given us chains this time --  
chains with hooks at the ends --  
and this time we are working men.  
Our arms and chests are bare.  
And some of us have forgotten  
the cold, and some of us assume

a ground. What has become  
of the pickaxe? What has become  
of the clipboard he held on his bare legs?  
Put this on your wall, ladies.  
Notice the black writing across

the milk-white sky. Read it all up,  
ladies. Read what it says. Read  
and notice the head cocked back,  
the wide stance, the thin fingers  
clamped around the heavy black book.

## Tryout

It's your first summer in Ohio.

Your older brother stands inside the fence  
on the field, shifting in line with the nine year-olds.

You find your way to the empty lot across the street.

You know he will be first.  
You don't care about the fly balls  
or the damp finger holes of the mitt  
you have to share with him.

You find a pick-up game at the lot.

The boys there need another.

The tallest boy is wearing shoes you have begged for.

They ask you to play.

You are taller than the other two  
who have not been chosen.

One of the boys points to you.

Another boy argues with him.  
They whisper to each other behind their mitts.

The second boy asks, "Are you a boy or a girl?"

Assume this.

Do you:

- A. Punch the tallest one in his face  
and ask, "Have you ever been punched  
that hard by a girl, asshole?"
- B. Say, "I'm a girl" and get picked last.
- C. Panic, say, "I'm a boy,"  
while your face turns warm and bright.
- D. Pause. Think. Say, "I don't know.  
Are you a boy or a girl?"
- E. Leave. Find your sister's old bike  
and pedal home before they notice  
the flowers on the seat.



Breaking up the Foundation of the  
Discovery Center Nature Preserve

Friday, we poured slop into wheelbarrows,  
walked them up ramps over forms,  
raked and screeded the slick,  
and sat with it in the sun.

Monday. The jack hammer chatters  
at the crooked quarter of foundation,  
chipping the rock to stones I lug  
to the truck. Slivers needle my face.  
I squint -- look like I am looking.

A doe turns an ear in our direction,  
twitches her nose. A crow settles  
on the smokestack above the factory.  
I pry at cracks -- twist  
the thick wire screen inside.

Children on trips will stand here  
in pairs -- in the building.  
The teacher will read from brass plaques,  
point past glass to pictures of insects  
and trees, stuffed birds and squirrels.

I pocket my gloves.  
Edges of rock mar my hands.  
Lime dust settles into my pores.  
The cement truck pulls up.

## Corporation Limits

I left the round raindrops.  
I left the tennis balls against  
the green cement court.  
I see too much.

The fingernail clicks a piano key --  
still music.  
The cat staring up at the squirrel  
in air. Mrs. Martin in her window pain.  
The trees, with copper in their veins,  
left dead -- no dying.

I pass  
posters of a boy they lost --  
his face, anyway -- smooth --  
two teeth missing.  
Is this what they miss?  
And if it doesn't look like me,  
should I look?

I stop  
at a place where children sing  
their social studies. I call  
what I choose what I choose.  
See. The hinge I am fashioning  
with bone and rock and spit.  
The grinding, the polishing,  
the color of skin.

## Chinese Fire Drill

I did what you said,  
Mister --  
stopped and ran  
like you told me  
and stopped.

The fish, they say,  
are swimming in circles;  
corn is melting  
in the factory.

Pinch my cheekbones, Mister.  
You know how we love  
that, you and me --  
a timecard clicking  
in the bicycle spokes.

Is that my iron?  
Are my arms burning?  
My fingers are too thick  
for the buttons.  
Desperate noises  
come from the receiver.

Could you tie my shoe?  
Tie my shoe, and feel  
my swollen knees.  
That glass eye  
could wish to be  
so smooth.

Press your ear  
to my stomach, Mister.  
It sounds  
like something.  
It sounds like  
needles shaking  
in a glass jar.

Boys Who Fiddle

## Storm Front

"Flowers vomit beauty at midnight"  
beside the smooth, white spindles of a picket fence.  
Miss Sweet catches the end -- the only defense  
the skinny, green stems can muster -- this flower

against the circumstance of night air and moonlight.  
Forget flowers. At dusk, the boys in grey slacks  
and sweater vests plot, behind their hands, attacks  
on the chain of elephants they are up against.

This, my friends, is what we call the "Jardin de  
Denouement" -- the first collision of swerves --  
the apex of a career, if you will, which serves  
as an explanation for everything but this.

Therefore, Miss Sweet leans her purple bicycle against  
the frayed trunk of a white birch. She allows the twine  
to slide against her smooth palm, finds  
the dented ladle hanging on its peg. Therefore,

what can be said for boys who fiddle  
with angry elephants on the fringe  
of the shortest day of the year? God, friends,  
is no philosopher! Although I do not know what

bolts through his head, there are drafts on thin pages  
under the arms of creased, fast people  
everywhere. God, I'm told, prefers sun hats, ripple  
tanks, and clear spheres of bluish lightning bolts

## Cold War

Tanks and clear spheres of bluish lightning bolts  
rolling down the boulevard shake the parlor windows.

Rutherford stops, turns an ear to the vibrating  
glass, and resumes his piano lesson.

Miss Daffodil fidgets with her knapsack  
on the powder-blue bench. She stoops to fix

her bootlaces and smooths her hair behind her ears.  
The soldiers load their cannons, set the sights

on the chain of elephants. They are against  
the colored animals. Private Dandelion

clutches his chest, paints the shiny bombs rust-orange.  
General Fudgecake polishes the box of medals.

Miss Daffodil clears her throat, removes the tight, white  
gloves, and spits at a quarter on the track.

Rutherford stops, cracks his knuckles, taps his foot,  
and resumes. The general's dogs run free, shit

beside the smooth white spindles of a picket fence.  
They say the general butters his banana

bread with a butcher's knife. The storm gathers  
to a purple front over the valley.

Small, black silhouettes of dots brace against  
the white horizon. Trees collect the mist.

## Green Boy

What can be said for boys who fiddle? Would the slightest  
applause strain his gentle nerves? Would wild animals  
parade down Pine Street? Who decides the color for  
caution, anyway? Given the circumstances of light  
and shadow, when can he show his emerald face  
to the crowd of fancy people with their small  
hands and delicate cheekbones? When can he stick his  
red tongue into the wind? How can the symbols he knows  
ever taste of butter snapping in a pan and feel  
like the cool skin of a peach against his ear?  
Who will stay to pick up the empty plastic cups?  
Who will clank the cold pipe against the iron bridge?

## Bomb

The boy clutches  
his shiny chest.  
Rust-orange paint turns  
thick as batter  
in the silver  
milk can. He  
forgets the end of  
his performance

and bows to soft,  
sporadic cheering.  
Would thundering applause  
strain his gentle nerves?  
His fingers smell  
of turpentine.  
His cheeks are pink  
as erasers.



Words for people

I am going for the world's record  
in patty cake. My mother feeds me  
rich shakes through a straw  
and lubricates my palms. Twenty-seven  
hours into it, I understand.  
The cramps in my wrists, the cramps and  
my swollen fingers, my cracking lips  
have something to do with it.

I take most of it back. I feed the chickens  
gum drops and shards of brown glass  
from a stainless steel bucket. I remove  
my hands. The cuts multiply. The red candy  
sticks to the flaps of skin. Chased for a good  
seven minutes, I hear a farmer from his ridiculous  
porch say something about "boot soles," something  
about "fear."

In my bedroom, the crowd cheers  
by remaining perfectly quiet.  
Seven hours to go. Someone has broken  
a delicate knick-knack from my shelf;  
someone actually yawned. My mother leaves  
to draw her bath. The mayor has called two times.  
Three hours to go; I've forgotten

the ribbons tied in her hair --  
the pigeon-toed girl.  
They wait for the cameras to arrive,  
They wait for the richest of sounds.  
There are words for people.

## Dead Worms

The children out the window are beating worms  
on the sidewalk with plastic bats.  
The air smells like air before it rains.  
It has just finished raining.

Mike Burns:  
elbow pointing straight up as he eats an apple,  
his neck longer than any other neck in the cafeteria.  
He stomps around the wet cement,  
the basketball court bleeding pink with worm,  
the skins smashed flat like letters  
from some foreign language.

They say he was hit two different times.  
The first time because he was three,  
and three-year-olds sometimes get hit by cars.  
The second time because of the first;  
a boy can get hit so hard.

I remember his name because he kissed me.  
Jeff Pennington paid him a nickel to kiss me  
on the cheek, under the slide. I remember  
because I cried in front of the girls  
and boys, in front of Mike Burns.

Red Boy

(For Ozzy)

The red boy,  
with his sad freckles,  
rubs his thumb against  
the toothbrush on a string  
around his neck. He pulls  
his knees to his chest  
and rests his orange  
head against the glowing  
blue window.  
The man pats his apron,  
twists his mustache,  
and paints the purple water  
full of ordinary, household things.

"That's a great question"

The tuna turn their crisp circles  
at the bottom of the tank.  
The diver -- meat at the end  
of a stick -- scours the glass.  
The otter rests his hind legs  
past his ears and nuzzles  
beneath his tail.

"Stay with the group.  
Move along."

Sharks are easy --  
all those teeth --  
bumping the windows.  
He presses his palm against  
the tank of glowing things,  
drifting, swallowing one another.  
And the map beeps out of control.  
The fish have learned to live  
in green bottles and rusty  
old sneakers. The anchovies  
drop their steely jaws.

"We'll meet back here at two."

The red boy wets  
his toothbrush  
in the drinking fountain.  
The man stirs his keys  
in his front pocket.  
The girl in the yellow dress  
points and giggles behind  
her fingers at the orange  
blotch of paint on his elbow.

Miss Sweet Sings Love Songs

## Thought

Why does it come to me on the toilet?  
My left thigh against the cold tub,  
my hands shaking off malt liquor and wine.  
The only paper in reach smells  
of something that smells of flowers.  
No pen.

I could carve it into the cupboard door above me.  
That would involve moving --  
reaching down around my ankles  
for my knife  
and standing.

Why didn't she call?  
When did I first stop chewing my food completely?  
("Mastication" it is called.)

I could grab the book of matches  
and burn this into myself  
like a string.  
Where? What would I burn?  
How long?

Days when I cupped my hands behind my knees,  
veins and tendons in my neck like cords to my jaw,  
head like a light bulb just before it goes dark,  
after the switch has been clicked off,  
before the filament gets the message,  
or stops getting the message.

My father used to stomp on my left foot  
to make me quit complaining  
how my right elbow  
hurt.

I could think it over and over,  
think it until it is part of me.  
What language should I think it in?  
What languages do I know?

## The Rest

(For Lary Kleeman)

That square, stainless steel  
pans crusted with burned lasagna  
and corned beef hash on a square,  
stainless steel table, wait for me.

That shopping carts are tipped over  
in the street.

That the wind threatens to blow  
my cap into the river  
as I pedal through street light  
on the bridge.

That men blow on cups of black coffee.

That my pores open, lungs fill  
with steam from the silver machine.

That children learn to tie their shoes.

That the radio makes the same sounds.  
D.J.s give away sandwiches  
and announce birthdays.

That someone just quit smoking.

That the bells in the tower ring  
when I step outside, into the day,  
find my bike, and pedal home.

This much I know:

look

across the dim  
room under  
a table  
the woman in  
the velvet dress  
has found  
the knee of  
the tall man  
with her hand



Miss Sweet Sings Love Songs

I am ready  
for tugs on braids,  
for black licorice  
and the stink of the still bay:  
reflection so bright  
I turn away  
and whisper to myself.  
I am ready for the day --

no, the early afternoon  
thick with hickory smoke,  
and I walk on my hands.  
Orange needles poke  
at my palms, gravel dents my skin.  
I am ready for the heavy yoke,  
yoke, the dull elbow,  
what's left of this joke --

no, this unfriendly riddle  
like mist around me.  
And I scramble for the pieces,  
scramble to complete the weave:  
a pair of shoes, a fiddle,  
and a ragged tapestry.  
I am ready to cast and cast  
and spill my bag of trees --

no, toothpicks, toothpicks  
to build a tower to death --  
no, a shrine to little dyings,  
to quivers in a breath  
and sores so small we hardly feel  
or know we feel, or feel we know  
when we are truly ready.  
I am ready.

Poem  
without the letter I

let's say a mother  
watches her daughter  
one boot one sandal  
underpants a turtleneck  
gallop over the yard  
the daughter  
on the damp grass  
only the left sandal  
and the snow boot  
the yellow underpants  
and turtleneck  
the grass let's say  
mashes where she gallops  
the daughter  
two wrong shoes  
a boot a sandal  
early May  
the mother  
on the porch  
watches  
sees her daughter  
mash new grass  
where she dances  
where she gallops  
the three year old  
the faded turtleneck  
underpants  
the clean May  
let us say we  
have found content  
the boot the gallop  
the strap of the sandal  
the mother's grey eyes  
the blades  
of mashed grass

As if by accident

I

The boy with dark  
eyes and one foot  
the size of a watermelon  
drags it over the black,  
lacquered floorboards  
to the table where she sits  
ripping corners  
from her napkin.  
He looks into her good eye.  
His small foot taps time to  
the song he wishes  
he could get  
out of his head.

Because of the milk  
turning thick and yellow,  
because the snow falls  
like static straight  
to the roofs of the cars,  
he leans in, strokes  
the hair from where  
her left ear used  
to be and whispers  
into the hole.

II

There are robots made to resemble cows  
just standing around like dots on green hills.  
There are plastic pocket rulers with different  
sized inches on sale at the dollar store.  
I have seen them there, on the middle shelf,  
next to a bin of left-handed scissors, yellow  
bottles of garlic salt and tubes of cream.  
There are people who think all of the time.

### III

Juan Pedro Leotard sits on the bunk  
with his fingers interlocked, resting  
against his lap, his socks drying

over the edge of the toilet. He counts  
the pink flecks in the linoleum. "In French,  
37 phonemes are usually recognized; in German, 46."

He traces with his finger the outline  
of the blue tulip tattooed on his forearm.

### The Weather Girl

She says, "leave,"  
and I tear a finger off  
and sneak it between the sofa cushions.  
I call her from my room.  
I say, "Must have dropped it."  
"Been having problems," I say.  
And the weather girl gives  
her strawberry hair  
one hundred brush strokes,  
the camera hums,  
and the biscuits turn  
the color of her cheeks  
in the sunlit kitchen.  
"Looks like rain," she says.

Today, I started walking every morning --  
the execution of which requires  
none of the gadgets about me.  
She raps at my door and runs naked  
to the neighbors' porch.  
I turn up the music.  
The trees along the boulevard  
are on fire. The holder focuses  
his hissing stream on a burning  
attached to the burn.  
The weather girl rubs her palms  
and points the trigger  
to the emerald curtain behind her.

Poem  
without the letter U

Miss Sweet  
inside the tent  
she raised  
sings at canvas  
sheds her work pants  
behold the clown  
of clown  
the soft palms  
the silver action  
of spoons  
the long reflection  
off a brass kettle  
left where it is  
from her thin  
mattress  
Miss Sweet  
strokes her beard  
thinks her songs  
and dogs cry out  
under overhangs  
in the dark  
fresh lime  
settles  
into dirt  
fireweed clings  
to the last  
of stalks  
cohos pass  
over herring  
real herring  
slow shady herring.

### After Thought

The tips of my ears are burning  
the tips of my ears and the tip  
of my nose and the blue-black  
sky is full of every star you can  
think of the moon is stuck behind  
the mountain and my beard is stiff  
and my tears are solid to my cheeks  
and boys play at joysticks video pinball  
space invaders orange marmalade  
the woman kissed me the woman  
with eyes like still mud-puddle water  
said "you're nice as paper cups"  
"kind as a tree with a swing in it"  
and she kissed me

The daughter tucks  
her long brown hair behind her ear  
the men touch each other on their backs  
say "Happy New Year" and "I love you"  
and "Happy New Year" and the north wind  
will burn your skin right off it's so cold  
and the red church has lit its light again.

Sitting on a Man



On the Mooring Mast

He thinks egg  
salad.  
He thinks  
the woman's hands  
in the still  
studio apartment.  
He thinks the sun  
and air.  
He forgets  
the Chrysler  
building,  
the pavement.  
He counts aloud:  
overalls, Sunday,  
gloves.  
On what  
he has built,  
the riveter  
steadies his gun.  
At the whistle,  
he finds  
a cracker box,  
balances himself  
with both hands,  
looks down.

## The Hyperbothesis

"To no one, in particular."

"Unconsciously Screaming"

This juggler fucked me in the biggest way,  
This lying sonofabitch juggler. Know  
This, Michael Moschen, I can read your hands,

Like wings of hummingbirds, or spokes of wheels  
That circle slowly backwards as they roll.  
They've started showing checkers on T.V.,

Real checker tournaments on Tuesday nights,  
With death-row inmates out of Joliet  
Who play a third-grade girl for their parole.

A woman cooking hashbrowns cranes her neck  
To see if young Karina earned a king  
Or double-jumped the rapist's last two men.

"This kid is pretty good," her husband says --  
commercial break, and order now and we'll  
throw in a vat of schnitzel, snow boots and . . .

They say that fingernails do not digest.  
(They'll poke holes in your stomach and kill you.)  
But Orpheus is sneaking them at night,

And Zeus, who never takes his pills, insists  
On cramming all the dominoes he can  
Into his t-shirt pocket, and when he

Bends down to tie his shoe, they all pour out.  
At night, sometimes he sucks his thumb and cries  
Until we cradle him and sing in French.

These gods are sorry losers, nurse. They think  
That they invented competition. So  
When they request it, never play their games.

And if you do -- now listen closely -- never  
Let them win! Cheat. Or quit. But never give  
Them nectar, nurse, or make them olive crowns.

Karina has just saved the world again, "Hurray!"

"First Song"

Nevermind Earth; sleep you,  
you burning attached to this burn.  
Search all the way to the womb--  
can't remember good, bad ideas.  
Self, self -- which?  
Winter's bonfires, ridiculous in summer.

"On the sidewalk"

One patayta, two patayta, three patayta, four,  
Cinnamon and sugar, buttered bread and borscht.  
Four banana, five banana, six banana, seven,  
Botswana has The Bomb, and Hitler is in Heaven.  
Mississippi, Mississippi, Mississippi, Miss,  
Children screaming "Chicklet," a peso for a stick.  
Combat boot, combat boot, combat boot, step,  
Soldiers in the street, red-winged blackbird in its nest.

"For in the deepest sense, we are  
all writing the same poem":  
in a skillet, melt a half cup butter  
and turn the heat on low.  
Then add the only moving thing,  
a bird, and simmer songs  
of nightingales, and mermaid's throats,  
and gusts of rugged wings.

Hand over that voice box, young man,  
and wipe that sidewalk clean,  
before I break your mandible  
for indecent loitering.

Son, look at me when I talk to you,  
Remove that silly helmet,  
Stick out that chest, and shine  
Those tennis shoes.

The complement of set S, you see,  
is the set of all points, which -- you see --  
do not belong to S. You see?  
So what's the hyperbothesis?

A cocktail made with bourbon, ice and lime?  
A note you pass in choir class?  
Or does it make a faucet leak?

No one can juggle twelve of anything.  
Eleven is by far enough.

"This is my present to the world"

Reclining in the dentist's chair, Monique  
decides that mentalism gets its roots  
from men. "From now on," she says, "I refuse  
to be a she to them." (Please rinse and spit.)

One feels one's stockings inching down one's legs.  
One thinks the lesson one read from the Koran:  
"Make medicine from suffering. Don't wish  
for perfect health." (Open wider please, wider still.)

I am the we, and they: the everything.  
I am pyramids and Luxembourg,  
potato soup and Swan Lake. I exist,  
create, and do not choose to reproduce.

Excuse me, miss, I am still reading this.  
Excuse me, sir, you left it sitting here.

The store is low on food, "NO MILK TODAY."  
But street performers need their calcium.  
Tomorrow, I will juggle birthday cakes,  
that is, if I can find some milk and eggs.  
The flour and vanilla I still have,  
but cows have quit producing milk, the hens  
have formed a union, and "Gorillas shot  
the mare." The puffin in his feathered cap  
has organized a peace retreat on some  
abandoned island in the Arctic Sea.  
"Dime con quien andas, y te dire' quien eres."  
Though no one will attend, the rumor is  
the checker season will proceed as planned.

"Take pity on the small ones"

Just outside of Brainsville,  
Under blankets, two  
Girls are playing board games,  
Goofing the rules.  
Lara reads from the dictionary:  
Elope -- "to run off secretly and marry."

This is the word of the Lord,  
His word that has  
Endured the play --

Persians and Greeks, turns  
Of nature, and  
The world's victors subdued.  
And then he made a  
Trumpet of his ass  
Over the noise they make --  
Even thumps of fists,  
Screams that sound like thinking.

And Christophe, He

And Christophe, he  
come back a year now  
to his sister.  
And now he skip  
his skinny rope all day  
and night.  
And he pin twigs and flowers  
in his hair and keep  
us up with the whistling.

So Mary sit rocking  
in the empty, yellow house.  
And Christophe, he sing  
"Peter, Peter, Peter"  
on the path out front.  
Some nights he tuck in ditches,  
and he stroke the cattails  
and pet the patches of soft clover.

And Mary hang the dotted  
sheets out the attic window.  
And Christophe, he drop the iron  
key into the river when he wash  
his amber hands. So Mary lean  
her fair face against the screen  
and sing "Glory to God in he highest."  
And Christophe, he shine sunset  
to the windows with his mirror.

Sitting on a Man

Wrapped in red and white  
for the river, she raises  
the cup of cloudy nectar  
and spits in four directions  
for the wind and the rocks  
and the yams. And the women hang

their skirts from street signs  
and beat their naked legs  
and beat, with the heavy  
wooden tools, the windshield  
and the mirrors and the rich  
leather of the red convertible.  
And he sits wringing his hair

in fists. And there's a green skirt  
flapping from the post office flagpole  
and sheer, silk skirts floating  
like leaves from high-rise windows.

And Dr. Archbold reclines  
in his dentist chair, thumbing  
through a magazine. And Father  
Moxley smooths the thick, brown  
paper with his palm, crosses  
his legs, dots the tip  
of his tongue with his pen.

## Hypothesis

From her wheezing ten-speed, she forgets paper,  
left-turn signals, and  
flour. She forgets, too, those pine-scented fresheners.

Does every backyard fire have to make the paper?  
Left there, where blue ranks  
among primary colors, could you have?

Because the pencil was dull, because paper  
left in a steam-filled  
bedroom tends to become soggy, he used chalk

to scrawl the message on the green wallpaper,  
left another long note  
in the shag carpet with his index finger.

The cardinal's wings flap like brown grocery paper  
left behind the chair.  
How long can she keep riding with no hands?

A man has been hired to drop confetti paper.  
Leftists will taper  
in, past the iron gate. Soldiers will rape her

in typical soldier fashion. The paper  
left in the presses  
will read "Get Ready" and "Ha Ha" and "sorry."



But One Clown

And I feel \_\_\_\_\_ about it

I

Jillian drums her clarinet  
against the cushion of  
the overstuffed chair  
and chants along with  
the noise from the speaker.  
"Yoo hoo walla walla,"  
calls the man  
from the ledge,  
and glass doors  
swing open  
when the girl  
in her Easter dress dances  
on the carpet before them.  
"This is Yi," the voice plucks  
to the sound of clanking cattle.  
"Yi is like you, is like,"  
clank clank, moo clank, click.

II

I shall speak of the incident to the children --  
indian style on rugs, wrapped in flannel blankets.  
I shall feed them their spoons of red syrup.  
Today's words: expressive, obsessive, dibble and kind.  
Today's answer: three-hundred-sixty-five.

III

Zero degrees. Zero degrees  
and her muffler tucked neatly  
in the sleeve of her overcoat.  
Jillian pretends to smoke  
the cigar she sneaked from the study.

The children at the bus stop  
turn their heads and tickle  
one another, and she digs  
her rubber boot into the drift  
of greying snow.

#### IV

The woman grunts when she laughs,  
and gags and stomps her leg  
where her foot used to be. "Tell me  
this," she is saying and wrings  
her fist above the bright bouquet  
of microphones.

Eluvial

Very likely,  
the boy is dead. Very likely.  
At the Wall of Monte Difícil,  
the man forgets to shift his weight,  
forgets the silver coin in his palm.  
The seam of light spreads  
down the long rock.

The woman elbows through the bodies  
to the boy, who has yellow hair.  
The girl smooths the hem  
of her wool skirt with her rough hands  
and pretends to look.

This is the tallest wall  
the man (whose name is very likely Joaquin)  
has ever seen.

When has he ever  
held still this long?

The girl thinks: o.k., o.k.  
The woman makes noises,  
rocks the boy, strokes the yellow hair.

The boy seems much too old for that.  
The man cannot even  
scratch.

He is completely gone.

The girl's shadow is sharp  
spilling against the jagged sandstone.

Everyone is looking up.

Alright, but not just yet

Ten polished shoes,  
and we check  
our wrist where our watch  
used to be. Let men  
who study science  
write their views:  
"All the tulip's got going  
for itself is it's easy  
to draw."

We hold it to light.  
We fight for the eye holes.  
As a child, we held cats  
by their feet, dropped  
the collection plate,  
teased Tom Sweeney  
in the shower. I hope  
we said thank you,  
I hope we did

a good job. It is dusk  
too early. The leaves  
have turned their silver  
bottoms upward. "If we  
are the devil, sit  
perfectly still."  
We practice our fists --  
anticipate the clank  
clank of wagons.

Adventures in dot to dot

Mr Clown holds the jar of yellow  
artichoke hearts at arm's length.  
He runs his thumb across  
the label.

"Oh, what have I done  
with my spectacles?" he says.

Sympathy Amanda O'Brian,  
the three year old,  
feeds money to the machine  
and rocks atop the padded stool,  
one, by one, by one.

Steering the perfect shopping cart  
with his immense hips, Mr. Clown  
selects only the finest cheeses  
and tobaccos -- smears of white  
on everything in his cart.

Sympathy Amanda has finally  
learned the buttons. Amelia Suitcase,  
in her window booth, is beaming. She says,  
"darling" and "okay" and "trouble is"

Mr. Clown has bought his lot,  
pulled his folding money from  
inside his old, red shoe. He walks  
in his stockings across the wet cement.

Therefore, young Sympathy marks  
every square with a seven in it,  
and Amelia Suitcase strokes  
her silver hair and orders  
her third plate of cheese fries.

In a warm corner of gravel  
under the iron bridge, Mr. Clown  
sinks his arms into his silly  
pockets.

On the road above him,  
the man in sagging overalls  
stops and breathes and rests  
the heavy, green buckets.

## Neighbors

I tell them, "Leave the boy alone."  
I tell them, "Return the boxes at once."  
I tell them, "For God's sake,  
loosen the chains and go."

The assistant manager motions  
to the hoodlums in their argyle uniforms  
and wipes the sugar sprinkles from her cheeks.  
They dump him in a patch of mint.  
"Try jumping now," one says.

The neighbors lug a green couch  
into the horse trailer. They say  
"sientate." They say "trabaja." The girl  
drags a lamp behind them. Sparks  
shoot from the sidewalk.

My room is cold.  
Ants have piled cigarette butts  
on the sunny corner of the porch.  
The shabby cat stretches her claws.

He sings to me, the boy I made  
from fingernails and hair.  
He stays in the box beneath my desk  
with a wadded scarf in his mouth  
and spits his teeth at me.  
The girl piles smooth rocks outside my door.  
She says, "This means love."

I wake up in my neighbor's tree,  
my head resting on a blanket,  
my knees tucked inside my sweater.  
I call out for a ladder  
or a piece of paper and a cigarette --  
whichever is easier.

I ask them please,  
would they please stop throwing butternuts at me.